ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 8/4/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.
ED000378	7130	N.A.

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S):
Eckert, Ruth E. and Stecklein, John E.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Academic Woman

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED YES ☒ NO ☒

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
Association of American Colleges Bulletin

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG. Univ. of Minnesota
ST. Minneapolis, Minn.
CITY, STATE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
Association of American Colleges
Washington, D.C.

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
XLV	390-397	Oct. 59	8

TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
survey

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

surveys Y-18A	careers R-41			
teachers Y-21	recruitment P-32			
sex factors Y-06				

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Report on Minnesota's women college teachers—why they became teachers, how they compare with their male colleagues, and what can be done to attract more women to the profession.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education

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Un. of Minnesota

Academic Woman

RUTH E. ECKERT and JOHN E. STECKLEIN

The woman as a college teacher—why she becomes one, how she compares with her male colleagues, and what can be done to attract more of her sisters to the profession

In a period when every source of high-level talent must be explored and utilized, special interest attaches to a study of women faculty members in American colleges. Although women account for only 22 per cent of all full-time academic staff members, both the numbers and the proportions of women college teachers must increase dramatically to meet soaring student enrolments. As several studies have shown,[1] the pool of underdeveloped talent is far larger for women than for men—making them the best single source for recruitment efforts.

A recent study of faculty members in one state—Minnesota—[2] including some representation of all 32 recognized higher institutions, throws interesting light on why women college teachers chose this field, how they view their jobs and what suggestions they have for recruiting and holding staff. Based on a 25 per cent stratified random sample of all full-time faculty members holding the rank of instructor or above and engaged in actual teaching, the Minnesota data were secured from 706 faculty members—or 94 per cent of all those whose cooperation had been invited. Of those who completed the four-page printed questionnaire, slightly more than a fourth (27.9 per cent or 197 respondents)[3] were women faculty members. About the same proportion of women (24 per cent) participated in the depth interviews conducted with almost a hundred of those who returned questionnaires.

The present article deals with an aspect not touched on in the general report, namely the similarities and differences in the responses given by men and women faculty members. It seemed desirable to find out whether these people selected college teaching for essentially the same reasons, whether they prepared similarly for their present jobs and whether they now appraised college teaching in much the same way.

Reprinted from ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES BULLETIN,
Volume XLV, Number 3, October 1959, pages 390–397.

7130

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Implications of these findings for the recruiting and holding of women faculty members are suggested in a concluding section.

Background Information

To interpret properly the responses these women gave, both in the questionnaire and in interviews, it is important to know something of their personal and family backgrounds. More than two fifths (44 per cent) of them were born in Minnesota, as contrasted with only 25 per cent of the men, and likewise higher percentages of women came from other parts of the north-central area.[4] Like their male colleagues most of these women had grown up in middle- and lower-class homes, in which the fathers had been tradesmen, farmers, skilled or semi-skilled workers. Typically neither parent had gone beyond the tenth grade, although the fathers of one fourth and the mothers of one fifth of the women's sample had had some college training, pointed chiefly toward educational and religious vocations. About a fifth of the women faculty members came from homes where one or both parents had been teachers. But excepting the higher proportions of women faculty members who had grown up in the Minnesota area, home background factors did not appear to differentiate the women from their male associates.

As might be expected, a much higher percentage of the women were single (54 per cent as against 17 per cent of the men). And rather surprisingly, the typical woman was some six years older than her male counterpart (48 as against 42 years of age)—a difference that showed up consistently in all four types of colleges studied.[5] Whereas 46 per cent of the women had already reached their fiftieth birthday, only 26 per cent of the men were in this age group. The percentage of younger women attracted to college faculties has apparently been declining, despite the fact the college enrolments have more than doubled in the past twenty years.

Choice of College Teaching

Like their male colleagues few of these women had given any serious thought to college teaching during their undergraduate years, with only one in eight reporting this as a tentative choice of career at the time of graduation from college. As many of those interviewed noted, college teaching seemed to be a goal far removed from the aspirations of young women, although many planned to become elementary or secondary teachers (60 per cent of the women versus 35 per cent of the men re-

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ported this goal at the time of college graduation). There was also some indication that parents had encouraged this latter choice for their daughters but not for their sons.

Although few of these future college teachers had definitely made up their minds by the time of graduation from college to join a college or university faculty some day, a significantly higher percentage of the men who became college teachers reported that they had viewed this career favorably as a personal goal (66 per cent of the men versus 50 per cent of the women gave this response). This contrasts with the strikingly similar percentages (74 for men and 78 for women) who looked upon college teaching as a desirable career for other people.

The three reasons which women faculty members most often cited as influencing their final decision to become college teachers were the offer of a college teaching job, though they had not sought it (mentioned by 60 per cent of the women and only 32 per cent of the men), their interest in working with college-age students (mentioned by 49 and 44 per cent respectively) and their desire to continue study in their subject field (specified by 40 and 44 per cent respectively).

Women, to a significantly lesser degree than men, ascribed their final choice of this career to factors directly associated with the job itself, such as the possibility of carrying on research (18 versus 32 per cent for men), good working conditions (33 versus 46 per cent), and the academic and social advantages a college faculty member enjoys (18 versus 26 per cent). They appeared to have been more influenced by external circumstances, such as being counseled in this direction by a respected teacher or counselor (39 per cent reported this as a contributing factor as compared with only 19 per cent of the men) or by being offered a college-level job, as noted above.

These findings seem to reflect some reluctance on the part of young women to visualize themselves as college teachers and hence to seek such a post. This view is supported by their later specification of the single factor that had most influenced their decision, for equal numbers of women mentioned internal and situational factors, whereas men identified personal interests and motivations more than twice as frequently as external factors. For both men and women these final decisions were usually reached some years after college graduation.

Preparation for College Teaching

Almost half of the women (43 per cent) had received some type of academic recognition as undergraduates, such as election to Phi Beta

Kappa or some other honor society, being granted a scholarship based on outstanding academic achievement or being graduated with honors. This was only slightly below the correlate figure (51 per cent) for men, suggesting that both groups had considerable potential for graduate work. Yet women students were much less likely to begin graduate work shortly after receiving their baccalaureate degrees. Although they had secured considerable parental help in financing their undergraduate work, they seemed to be on their own financially once they had their first degree. When asked how they managed to finance their advanced studies, significantly more women than men reported the use of personal savings, whereas men far exceeded women in the use of scholarships and fellowships, staff appointments as teaching and research assistants, GI aids and "earnings of a spouse" to finance extended periods of study.

This dearth of financial aids for women graduate students may partly explain why so few women continued to the doctorate, despite their excellent undergraduate records. Some earned only a single degree (13 per cent), supported in most instances by some advanced non-degree study, with the great majority reporting an M.A. or M.S. as their highest degree (49 per cent), again often buttressed by some study beyond this point. Only 26 per cent of the women, as contrasted with 51 per cent of the men, had earned their doctorates, even though the women had had six additional years on the average in which to fulfill graduate requirements.

The great investment of time that many women faculty members had made in elementary and secondary teaching probably contributed to this differential in training. Three fifths of the women (61 per cent as contrasted with 36 per cent of the men) reported that their first full-time job after college graduation had been in this field. A significantly higher proportion of women had also come directly to their present college jobs from a position in the lower schools (36 versus 17 per cent). Although the typical woman faculty member was 48 years old, she had been on a college or university faculty for only eight years, which suggests how recently many women joined college staffs.

Current Positions

Several notable differences also emerged in an analysis of these faculty members' current jobs. In indicating reasons for joining their present staffs, women mentioned more often than men that they liked the type of school, that they had been assigned to it (a response characteristic of members of religious orders) or that the position had been "available."

In contrast, men tended to stress the reputation of the school, the research opportunities it provided and the salary offered.

Only three fifths as many women as men had attained associate or full professorships (37 versus 56 per cent); they were also seriously underrepresented in certain types of institutions (notably the university), and in certain subject fields, such as mathematics, the biological and physical sciences and most professional specialties. Two fields—the humanities and professional education—accounted for half of all the full-time women teachers serving in these colleges. Some of those interviewed, including both men and women, felt that women were discriminated against in many departments and that they could not compete effectively with their male colleagues for promotions or salary increases.

The duties performed by men and women faculty members in their present jobs also varied significantly, and in directions suggested by the earlier findings. Women gave more of their time to teaching and to services to student groups, whereas men devoted relatively more time to research activities, committee work and off-campus projects. The largest single difference related to research, where 63 per cent of the women, as compared with 36 per cent of the men, reported no time at all spent on research and scholarly writing. Were the recommendations that these faculty members made for a redistribution of their working time to be adopted, the above differences would become even greater. Although both men and women agreed that the greatest need for more time was in the area of research and scholarly writing, a much higher percentage of men than women (67 versus 47 per cent) stated this. On the other hand, a significantly higher percentage of women than men wanted to devote still more time to teaching and to student counseling, or said that they did not wish to see their present distribution of effort modified in any way.

Appraisals of College Teaching as a Career

When asked about the chief satisfactions they had experienced from faculty service, the vast majority of these faculty members agreed that they liked their present jobs and the status they enjoyed, professionally and socially, as college teachers. Women were more likely than men to mention "good students" and "desirable colleagues" as major sources of satisfaction, whereas male faculty members seemed to prize especially the opportunities that some college jobs provide for research and the freedom and independence enjoyed by college teachers. Both men and

women indicated relatively few dissatisfactions, although men were more articulate than women about the limited time available for scholarly study and the low salaries received.

General evaluations that these faculty members made of their career showed that almost half of both groups were "very satisfied" and that most of the rest had experienced "moderate satisfaction" from their service as college teachers. But men seemed a little more reluctant than women to do it all over again, with 19 per cent of the men and 11 per cent of the women saying that they were either doubtful or would not again become college teachers if they were now faced with this decision.

Suggestions for Recruitment and Retention of Staff

Given an opportunity to comment on ways of attracting qualified people into college teaching, both men and women faculty members stressed the need to raise salaries, with men giving greater emphasis to this than women (66 versus 44 per cent). Men also attached somewhat greater weight to the need for providing faculty members with "reasonable" teaching assignments, adequate clerical help, assistance on research projects and greater job security. Women faculty members, on the other hand, more frequently stressed the importance of providing counseling and guidance regarding career opportunities in this field, making more scholarships and other financial aids available to qualified candidates and furnishing adequate pre-service education.

In commenting on ways in which colleges might successfully hold faculty members, once they had been recruited to college teaching, a larger percentage of men again emphasized higher salaries, reductions in teaching loads, better facilities for research and the provisions of leaves for study. Women significantly exceeded men on only a single item, namely that administrators should be more generous in their commendation of faculty achievements (mentioned by 11 per cent of the women and 3 per cent of the men).

Summary and Implications

The present study, based on almost 200 women faculty members in Minnesota's 32 public and private colleges, underscores the need to attract women to careers in college teaching. To an even greater degree than their male colleagues, the women presently teaching in Minnesota colleges appear to be there more by accident than by clear design. Despite excellent undergraduate records, they were handicapped financially

in securing advanced training; this accounts partially for the long period many of them spent on elementary and secondary school staffs. In consequence, significantly fewer had earned a doctor's degree or had been promoted beyond an assistant professorship, despite the fact that the women were typically six years older than the male faculty members studied. Being burdened with the heavier teaching and service loads characteristic of junior-level positions, they also had little opportunity to do the research and scholarly writing on which professional advancement so often depends.

Despite such handicaps, these women faculty members appeared to be as satisfied with their choice of career as their male colleagues were and even more ready to reaffirm it, given the opportunity to re-make the decision. But the pattern of their reported satisfactions differed somewhat, with a greater emphasis placed on good human relations as contrasted with the emphasis that men gave to material rewards, opportunities to do creative work in their subject fields and the freedom and independence associated with faculty service. Recommendations given for recruiting and retaining qualified faculty members revealed similar differences, with the women apparently more sensitive to the human factors, such as providing counseling for prospective faculty members and developing harmonious administrative-faculty relationships, and the men more concerned about program adjustments, research facilities and the rewards given for effective service.

At least three major implications can be drawn from these findings for the future staffing of college and university programs. In the first place, a more determined effort must be made to acquaint women undergraduates with the opportunities and satisfactions of careers in this field. If this is done effectively, many of those who had planned to teach in the lower schools may view such service as a possible stepping-stone to a college position, and others, whose primary commitment is to a subject field rather than to the teaching function, will glimpse the rich possibilities of developing their scholarly interests through membership in a college faculty. Several faculty members suggested in their interviews that the college teaching profession should be talked about and made more attractive to grade school and high school students; others urged that promising undergraduate students be used as assistants and student teachers in order to get them actively involved in the field.

Secondly, financial support for graduate studies must be made more widely available to qualified women students. To defer such study until

a young teacher can finance the program for herself often results in the long postponement or abandonment of such plans. Studies are urgently needed to find out what financial aids in the way of graduate scholarships, fellowships and assistantships are now open to qualified women students and what the major blocks may be to making full use of these opportunities

The in-service education of women faculty members likewise demands attention. Since most women teachers have not completed a doctoral program, they stand in special need of leaves for advanced study and of adjustments in their loads that will encourage completion of a thesis and other types of scholarly endeavor. Encouragement in this direction given by perceptive administrators and colleagues will reinforce these efforts, since women faculty members appear to be strongly influenced by such recognition. In institutions where faculty members, without regard to sex, are helped to reach their full professional stature and to know the abiding satisfactions of college teaching, both men and women students will be attracted to careers in this field. Women faculty members who are genuinely respected and honored on the local campus may be particularly effective in this respect, since their presence will help gifted women students to identify themselves with the role of the college teacher and to prepare themselves for this service.

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1. Dael, Wolfle, *America's Resources of Specialized Talent*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1954, and the Educational Policies Commission, *Manpower and Education*, National Education Association, Washington, D.C., 1957.

2. John E. Stecklein and Ruth E. Eckert, *An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing the Choice of College Teaching as a Career*, conducted under a grant from the Cooperative Research Program, U.S. Office of Education, 1958.

3. These 197 women included 158 in four-year colleges (86 in private liberal arts colleges, 29 in state colleges, and 43 at the University of Minnesota) and 39 teaching in junior colleges. The statistics used in the present report are based on those teaching in baccalaureate and advanced programs.

4. Where differences are mentioned in the text, they satisfy at least the .05 level of confidence (indicating that chance alone would account for these differences only once in twenty instances). Those characterized as "significant" meet the .01 confidence level, which provides a more rigorous test of their importance.

5. See Stecklein and Eckert, *op. cit.*, for separate analyses of the junior college, private liberal arts college, state college and university samples, on this and other points touched on in the present article.